



Billy OCEAN

LESLIE Sebastian Charles aka **Billy Ocean** holds the prestigious title of being the **biggest selling British black artist of all time**. During a career spanning over 25 years, he has sold in excess of **30 million singles** and albums worldwide, reaching his pinnacle throughout the 1980's. His determination to succeed and talent have always shone through even the darkest of times, proving that when the going gets tough... the tough really does get going.

He was born on the 21st January 1950, in Fyzabad, Trinidad. From an early age inspired by his dad's love of Calypso music, he started playing a small steel pan and a blue ukulele, bought for him by his mother's friend. Billy attended choir practice with his two elder sisters and the school's head teacher was so impressed by his vocal performances that she would often enter him into singing competitions. In 1958, his family immigrated to England, settling in the East End of London. At age 11, Billy attended Stepney Green School for boys where he was an active member of both the football and cricket teams

After leaving full time education he had a variety of jobs including mattress making, carpentry and working as a security guard before going to college on a bespoke tailoring course. Whilst serving his apprenticeship in the Spitalfields rag trade, he bought an old piano for £38 lent to him by his boss. As a fully

qualified tailor he worked for Norton and Sons in London's famous Savile Row. To supplement his income he performed with various local bands including Shades of Midnight at the Bluecoat Boy in Norton Folgate, as well as working as a session singer around the recording studios. After recording as Joshua, Piggy Bank and Sam Spade amongst a variety of other pseudonyms, his first single "Nashville Rain" was released under his own name Les Charles in 1971.

"On The Run" had its first airing on Radio One thanks to Annie Nightingale. Billy recalled, "It was a magical moment," as sewing machines stopped and the volume on the radio went up. Unfortunately not everyone felt the same and later that day the singer was promptly sacked. He took a job working nights at the giant Ford Motors plant in Dagenham Essex allowing him pursue his musical ambitions during the day. In 1975, adopting the name Billy Ocean, he signed a production deal with Dick Leahy's GTO label. His single "Love Really Hurts Without You" reached number 2 in the charts selling 250,000 copies.

His first album, "Billy Ocean" was released in 1976 and "Everything's Changed" was released as a single to credit Billy as a composer. He worked with writer and producer Ken Gold on his next Album "City Limit". Billy acknowledges Gold's contribution. "He really should get a little respect in the sense that he was one of the innovators of English producers, taking black artists and treating them with a certain amount of respect and being serious with the music and sort of making an opening for us". City Limit was dedicated in memory of Billy's father who had passed on during the recording.

In 1979, his wife, Judy, gave birth to their first child, a beautiful baby girl called Cherie and their son, Anthony followed in 1983.

Laurie Jay clinched a deal with Clive Calder's newly formed Jive records

and Billy flew to New York to work with producer Keith Diamond who was also Trinidadian born, tasked to do four songs as a try-out, they completed almost an entire album. One of these tracks "European Queen" was issued as Billy's first single for his new label, but Clive thought "Caribbean Queen" sounded more exotic and would appeal to a wider audience. The new recording was released in September 1984 and went on to be a worldwide hit earning Billy a Grammy award the following year. Another version of the song entitled "African Queen" was recorded for the African music market.

Barry Eastmond produced "Love Zone" selling 100,000 copies and adding yet another gold disc to Billy's collection. He spent most of 1987 recording his next album with Lange/Braithwaite/Eastmond and enjoying fatherhood with his baby daughter, Rachel. After years of hard work and well-earned success, Billy decided to take time away from the music business and devote himself to his young family.

Jive issued a "Greatest Hits" package that featured Hollywood actor Will Smith in September 1989, which became Billy's biggest, selling UK album. Billy started performing with Ebony Steel Orchestra, one of Europe's top steel bands, rekindling his passion for pan. Starting off on Iron but later moving on to

Tenor, he played at the World Festival in Trinidad, the European festival in France and the Notting Hill Carnival Panorama that Ebony won for a record 15th time in 2006.

In 1993, a younger looking Billy sporting dreadlocks following his conversion to the Rastafarian religion recorded his "Time To Move On" album with R. Kelly.

In September 1998 Jive issued "Love Is For Ever", a twenty-four track double album that achieved gold disc status. Billy performed "When The Going



Gets Tough, The Tough Get Going" with Celebrate Music, a combination of 36 South African and UK musicians at the South Africa Freedom Day concert attended by Dr. Nelson Mandela in April 2001 at London's Trafalgar Square. On 11th November 2002, Billy was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music by the University of Westminster, where his eldest daughter Cherie studied for her degree in Commercial music. Cherie signed a recording contract with Jive in 2004 and released her first

single "No 1". To celebrate, Billy and family dined at a restaurant in London's Savile Row, the very place he started some 30 years before. Billy resides in England, where he enjoys gardening and spending time with his family at their home in Berkshire.

By Mark Dennelly